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AUTHOR Blai, Boris, Jr.
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ABSTRACT

This essay reviews the current status of private independent junior colleges in the United States. Several studies and innovative programs are cited. Because private junior colleges face shrinking enrollments and diminished funding for instruction, services, and activities, they must now stress cost-effectiveness and practical financial management if they are to remain vigorous. They must limit their hiring of new faculty and reduce the number of courses, small classes, and administrators. However, they will continue to be an integral and significant part of the two-year college movement if they are committed to the movement as a field in which their future lies and if they are committed to institutional purposes which go beyond competition with public two-year colleges. Also, they must: (1) focus attention on their educational program and their services to society, (2) focus on well-rounded continuing development programs, (3) emphasize both short-term and long-term goals, (4) enlist trustees and other volunteers who believe in, work for, and give adequate support to their programs, (5) use educational objectives relevant to these times, (6) institute effective student recruitment programs, (7) work for favorable state and federal tax laws, and (8) evaluate their institutional effectiveness on a regular basis. (DC)

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Will Independent Junior Colleges Survive?

by

Boris Blai, Jr.
Director, Institutional Research
Harcum Junior College, Pennsylvania

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

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CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION

More than a few educators and government officials are predicting spending cuts of as much as 30 percent in the field of post-secondary education during the next ten years. Shrinking enrollments, diminished dollars for instruction, services, and activities, as well as materials and faculties, are the dire predictions they offer. Some speak of a protracted period of depression, wherein intense competition will exist for fewer numbers of faculty and administrative positions. Yet the situation may not be as grim as it sounds. Bonham suggests that some institutions and some individuals may actually benefit from the anticipated changes. Astute management, for example, "could result in a beneficial distillation of curricula, in a sharper focusing of institutional goals and capabilities...in a 'tighter' ship that is also a better ship."

Many private, independent two-year colleges have been leaders in trying new methods of teaching, new ways of counseling, new ways of contributing to the welfare and growth of each

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student, and, through systematic institutional research, new ways of effectively evaluating how well they have imposed their self-imposed goals and objectives. Harcum Junior College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, for example, utilizes an employer-based evaluation plan to gauge program effectiveness. Since a very large part of the college's institutional budget is devoted to occupational curricula, such evaluations are considered essential elements for any practical system of educational accountability.

Let's examine the evidence. Today there are over 250 private junior colleges in the United States. They represent more than 13% of the two-year colleges in the country; the total consisting largely (87%) of public, tax-supported community colleges. The student clientele attending private colleges number in the neighborhood of 140,000, comprising about 5% of those in attendance at all two-year institutions.

Within the private sector, in terms of institutional affiliation and/or support, there are two principal groups; the private, independent junior colleges which usually operate under the control of self-perpetuating boards of trustees, and the private, church-related institutions. For the most part, the private, independent colleges receive their financial support from tuition, endowments, and the gifts of alumni and friends. About half are coeducational, and the majority are residential colleges, providing housing and attracting students from beyond the local community. It is upon the 152 private, independent junior colleges that we focus.

Probably the greatest transformation that occurred in

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higher education during the 1960's was the now well-documented growth of the two-year college movement. With little fanfare, junior colleges developed into a major force in American education. As late as 1958, less than 400,000 students were enrolled nationally. Within a decade, this number had quadrupled; and five years later in 1973, the total exceeded 3,000,000. By 1980, it is expected that 40 out of each 100 students enrolled in higher education will be attending two-year colleges--with a total enrollment of 5 million! The independent two-year colleges have been a part of this growth. Freedom to experiment and innovate in the classroom and to adapt their educational offerings to the specific needs of their clientele have contributed to the sustained vitality of independent two-year colleges.

A goodly number of independent colleges have created or joined other institutions in their international study programs and culturally-enriching activities. Still others have taken advantage of their campus locations to offer unique and unusual teaching-learning experiences. The Washington Summer Program at Mount Vernon Junior College, Washington, D.C. includes both course offerings and internship programs. The program combines the advantages of classroom experience with all the opportunities to observe and participate in the practical dynamics of national government at the Capitol.

In contrast to the tax-supported community colleges, many private, independent junior colleges have retained the virtue of small size, offering as it does greater opportunity to work closely with individual students and to develop special

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programs for them. Although size considerations do impose some problems in terms of limited faculty, finances, and facilities, many colleges have demonstrated sound management thinking to compensate for tight resources. In further enrichment endeavors, clusters of these colleges exchange teachers and staff members, holding workshops and symposia to increase the knowledge of both faculty and staff. Other colleges demonstrate leadership in instructional experimentation, devise more viable course patterns, and disseminate the results of useful discoveries that increase the effectiveness of the teaching-learning transaction. Results are shown in terms of successful transfer records and employment achievments of their students.

Since more than half (52%) of these independent colleges are at least 45 years old, having founding dates prior to the Great Depression of the 1930's, they have by definition 'weathered' the severe economic drought of that period. This suggests that many have a 'track record' of practical management competence. As in other aspects of junior college development, the financing patterns and success of individual institutions reflects, essentially, the quality of the management decisions made by its executive management and boards of trustees. Knowing the 'who', 'what', 'why', 'when', and the 'how' of sound financial management is a critical dimension of educational administration; most particularly urgent today as we listen to the insistent ticking of the accountability clock.

One of the greatest challenges to private junior colleges is to investigate alternative strategies that are adaptable

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to particular college settings. In order to do so, goals and measurable objectives must be carefully delineated and designed in order to attain those goals and the specific needs of students.

A 1965 study by Pine Manor Junior College in Massachusetts found that private junior colleges have patterns of expenditure which differ from those in other types of institutions; having lower instructional costs, they spend proportionately more than do four-year colleges for general administration, student services, public services, and general institutional expenditures, and have lower expenditures for libraries. Since these schools depend heavily upon student fees and since private expenditures are being curtailed and independent colleges are suffering severe cutbacks, it is unfortunate that neither existing federal legislation nor the administrative branch of the government has adequately recognized or supported these private institutions. At present, they have but minimal representation in the U. S. Office of Education, and have not received an equal share of federal funds appropriated for education. Richard Whitter, Executive Director, National Council of Independent Junior Colleges, abstracting HEGIS data (National Center for Educational Statistics, U. S. Office of Education), reveals modest revenues from federal grants: 1968-69= 4.1% ; expressed as a percentage of current funds revenues; for academic 1969-70, some 4.9% ; 1970-71= 5.2% ; and 1971-72= 8.7%.

Mackay highlights some of the distinct advantages of the private two-year college that contribute to their educational effectiveness and increase their general 'index' of survival.

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These include community projects, remedial courses, international projects, in-service training, cooperative programs with other schools, and inner-city disadvantaged programs. Almost 170 people involved in these institutions offered examples of innovations and stimulating, imaginative practices. Selected samples of some of these programs and activities show their scope and their efforts to institute programs with special appeal. Community projects, for example, are conducted at Dean Junior College (Massachusetts) wherein various civic services are provided to local governments in and around the college and at Westbrook Junior College (Maine) leadership seminars to train civic leaders in the Portland area and weekly seminars for parents of adolescents are conducted. Spartanburg Junior College (South Carolina) has a special summer program for 'high risk' students in English and Mathematics, while Harcum Junior College (Pennsylvania) conducts follow-up studies of calculated-risk (provisionally-admitted) freshmen.

International projects are also popular. Bennett College (New York) has an Overseas Service Program which includes preparation and in-service training for bi-lingual secretaries, an overseas experience for design majors, and an East-West Studies Program. Green Mountain College (Vermont), in conjunction with the University of Vermont, has a junior year abroad program.

In-Service Training has been instituted at Lees Junior College (Kentucky) wherein an intensive self-study is conducted

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in depth at the end of the academic year for two weeks. The entire faculty studies and analyzes philosophy, curricula, and directions of the college, and relates these to their own individual courses. A Faculty Growth Program, a Title III program at Monticello College (Illinois) has established sabbaticals to visit other campuses, do small projects, and assemble learning materials. At Alice Lloyd College (Kentucky), the 'Human Encountering' Project brings four Appalachian colleges and the Council of Kentucky Independent Colleges and Universities together. Colleges to which students from Alice Lloyd have gone on these exchanges include Cornell, Kenyon, Wittenberg, Harvard, Garland Junior, and Radcliff. Union College's (New Jersey) extensive program in astronomy and sky study establishes a working partnership with public and parochial school systems of the county. Their observatory is also used by nearby colleges and professional scientific groups.

Inner City-Disadvantaged Projects also abound in the private colleges. With OEO Funds, ghetto girls train to become teaching aides and Garland Junior College (Massachusetts), in cooperation with the Boston Welfare Department, trains married women receiving welfare assistance to become teaching aides. Utilizing Chicago as a 'laboratory', Kendall College (Illinois) involves students in Day Care Center-Cook County Hospital and a variety of community action projects. Experiences also include ecological studies of Chicago and environs.

As they compete for support in the academic marketplace, the financing of private junior colleges, both church-related

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and independent, looms as a major financial management challenge. For the church-related sector, schools may look to support from constituent bodies, as well as tuition and other fees, gifts, grants, and alumni assistance. Independent two-year colleges must make-do without support from constituent bodies. Their financial solvency must be achieved without this added source of income. Under these circumstances, it is therefore particularly noteworthy that many private independent junior colleges continue to enjoy prospects for a long, vigorous, and productive life.

Although cost effectiveness is only one of several practical steps toward institutional vitality, it is one giant step toward survival. Today, in another tight economy, America's independent junior colleges must limit their hiring of new faculty, and reduce the number of courses, small classes, and too many administrators overseeing programs. They must limit their expenses by curtailing program expansion; they must reexamine themselves individually and collectively and apply practical management skills to their problems.

Although the financial struggle is there and management must be especially adept in a tight market, from a qualitative standpoint, there has never been any doubt about the soundness of junior college programs. Evidence of a very convincing nature indicates that this will continue to be true. The 1964 Junior College Directory reports 59.1% of the junior colleges in the United States were accredited by regional accrediting associations. The 1972 Directory reveals that 74% of independent junior colleges were accredited.

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As an integral and significant part of the junior college movement, private junior colleges will continue, the successful ones possessing two characteristics: a commitment to the junior college movement as a field in which their future lies, and equal commitment to institutional purposes which go beyond being merely competitors of public two-year colleges. With all this, in order to survive, these private independent colleges must focus attention on their educational program and their services to society (unless institutions fulfill a need and serve a great purpose in the 70's, why should they survive?); find time to do the necessary planning with both short-term and long-term goals; focus on well-rounded continuing development programs which emphasize support for and opportunities for investment in worthwhile educational objectives; and enlist trustees and other volunteers who will believe in, work for, and give adequate support to their programs. Well-defined educational objectives relevant to these times are necessary as are effective student recruitment programs disigned to bring to the institution the quality and quantity of students who can best be served. Able management, well-rounded development programs, trustee leadership, and favorable state and federal tax laws are also prerequisites to continuing existence.

One last dimension should be noted. In one sense, it is an integral part of all others: it is evaluation, the fifth step within the total management process of Plan, Organize, Staff, Execute, and Evaluate. Ignorance is more costly than education. For some time industry has realized that institutional

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research (or self evaluation) is essential to the successful accomplishment of the first four steps in the management process. Education, very much like industry, should also be asking many searching questions of itself because education has actually become big business. Within this framework, institutional research and evaluation of institutional effectiveness are important.

The time is now long-overdue to recognize the mutuality of interests and common goals of private and public two-year colleges. Clearly, a remarkable and inviting future is ahead for those who prepare professionally to have a part in what is perhaps the most noteworthy educational development of this century. Helping to prepare students to effectively assume their varied roles within today's highly complex and competitive world is the common thread; it links both in an exciting common cause. Realistically, both public and private two-year colleges must recognize that contemporary Americans from all socio-economic backgrounds are expected to assume varied roles throughout the course of their lives.

There is no education technology which will ever substitute for education management. I paraphrase George Bonham, who recently noted that higher levels of both competence and perception are going to be required as a matter of course. Those two-year, independent junior colleges which continue to achieve them will play an important role in the future academic world. For these colleges to survive, it is sine qua non to avoid the twin pitfalls of complacency and misdirection by achieving higher levels of both perception and competence.